

THE CRYING STOPPED, AND ISAAC WAS DEAD DETROIT - A NEIGHBOR TELLS COURT OF BOY'S LAST HOURS AT FOSTER HOME

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In the hours before 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge died of a beating in a Detroit foster home, a child cried loudly enough to be heard next door and an adult female yelled for someone "to shut the damn kid up," neighbor Drunella Jackson testified Monday.

At the time, Jackson lived next door to Charlsie Adams-Rogers, 60, the state-licensed foster mother whose trial on involuntary manslaughter and child abuse charges began Monday in Wayne County Circuit Court.

Jackson was one of two prosecution witnesses who described improper supervision of Isaac and his sister by Adams-Rogers' then 12-year-old adopted daughter and drug use in front of the children.

Adams-Rogers has blamed the girl for causing Isaac's fatal injuries on Aug. 16, but only Adams-Rogers has been charged. The girl told investigators she was playing with Isaac, throwing him onto a mattress but he hit the floor.

If convicted of involuntary manslaughter for failing to protect the child while he was in her care, Adams-Rogers could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison.

She also is charged with two child abuse counts involving Isaac and his 4-year-old sister, who was in foster care with him. If convicted of the more serious abuse charge, Adams-Rogers faces up to four years in prison. The trial, being heard by Judge Vera Massey Jones, is expected to last a week.

Jackson said **the crying stopped** roughly 30-45 minutes before emergency workers arrived at the west-side house.

Jackson lived next door to Adams-Rogers for 16 years.

Under cross-examination by Adams-Rogers' attorney, Warren Harris, Jackson acknowledged that she never called police about the incident, even after later seeing media reports of the death. Her statement was taken by police May 15 after officials contacted her.

Jackson testified that she did call police about people who occasionally came and went late at night at Adams-Rogers' house because they were loud and disruptive. Jackson also said Adams-Rogers frequently used expletives when referring to the children instead of using their names.

A second witness, Starkemia Taylor, mother of one of Adams-Rogers' grandchildren, testified that she and some of Adams-Rogers' older grandsons would "very often" smoke marijuana in the house with Isaac and his sister present.

Adams-Rogers knew about the drug use and sometimes told them to stop, Taylor said.

Both Jackson and Taylor said Adams-Rogers' 12-year-old daughter was left to supervise the children. Taylor said the girl wasn't always happy about it and said "she was sick of watching the kids, that they were getting on her nerves," Taylor testified. Her testimony is to continue today.

Isaac's parents, Matthew and Jennifer Lethbridge of Canton, sat quietly in the courtroom Monday and declined to comment. All 10 of their children have been placed in foster care, including a baby born this spring.

Isaac and his sister were removed from their parents' home in Westland on neglect charges in September 2005.

According to a Free Press investigation published in January, the two were placed in three troubled foster homes by the Lula Belle Stewart Center of Detroit. The state suspended the center's license to place children in foster care after Isaac's death.

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Charlsie Adams-Rogers talks with attorney Warren Harris during a break in her trial Monday in Detroit.

Isaac Lethbridge died Aug. 16.

MARY SCHROEDER / Detroit Free Press

Isaac's parents, Jennifer and Matthew Lethbridge, listen.

CAPTIONWRITER: MARY SCHROEDER / Detroit Free Press

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